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29 December 1985*In the Wake of the Pollard Affair*

# Israel and the U.S. Stay On Speaking Terms

By DAVID K. SHIPLER

WASHINGTON — By all indications, the United States was inclined last week to forgive, if not quite forget, Israel's recent spy caper against the United States. Administration officials willing to talk about the Israeli-American relationship were reaching for metaphors of diminution, calling the episode of espionage "a bruise" on a healthy body, or "a blip" on a graph of rising cooperation.

Practically everyone declined to discuss the case itself, in which a civilian intelligence analyst for the United States Navy, Jonathan Jay Pollard, is under indictment for selling secret documents to Israel. Even Abraham D. Sofaer, the State Department's legal counsel, would not answer inquiries about the mission from which he had just returned as the head of an investigative group that questioned the Israeli officials who apparently received the documents. (*The problem of timing spy arrests, page 5.*)

The State Department chided Israel a month ago for dragging its feet on promised cooperation with investigators, but then issued an effusive statement following the mission, hailing Israel's "full cooperation" and praising "the solid foundation of deep friendship, close affinity and mutual trust" between the two Governments. American officials, taking their cues from the staunch pro-Israel sentiment of President Reagan and Secretary of State George P. Shultz, were clearly trying to treat the Pollard case as an isolated event that could now be consigned to the past.

The entire incident testified to the remarkable closeness of the American-Israeli relationship — first, that the United States would be shocked by Israel's spying; second, that the Administration would demand the right to interrogate the Israeli agents involved, and third, that Israel would feel it actually had to produce the agents for questioning. This is part of the cycle of dependency and intimacy that some Israelis believe has damaged their country's freedom of maneuver; Prime Minister Shimon Peres faced some criticism at home for being too forthcoming with the United States in the affair.

Whether the Pollard case was really an aberration is another question, one answered eloquently by its failure to surprise many American intelligence and law enforcement officials who are familiar with the extent to which Israel tries to gather secrets in the United States, especially on sensitive technical and scientific matters. But unless the case becomes the first thread in an unraveling fabric of Israeli espionage, American officials and experts on the Middle East outside the Government doubt that it will have any lasting impact on the relationship.

As during previous periods of strain, there has been some grumbling in the Pentagon, the Justice Department and elsewhere about the close Israeli-American ties. A Justice Department official, complaining that diplomats at the State Department were too gentle with Israel when Mr. Pollard was first seized, remarked acidly, "After the arrest, they really rallied round the flag — but which flag is the question." A pro-Israel De-

fense Department official said he had not realized how much hostility existed toward Israel at middle bureaucratic levels, and he worried about the corrosive effect on overall United States support. "You have an underlying fragility that was only overcome by political fear," he said.

Yet since the United States began selling weapons to Israel in 1968, the ties have also enjoyed a growing resilience. Mr. Reagan, supported by a reflexively pro-Israel Congress, has approved increasingly generous aid, shifting the money from loans to grants, which amount this year to \$3.75 billion. The two countries have inaugurated a free trade area designed to phase out tariffs and quotas on most goods. They have enhanced their military and intelligence relations through an agreement on strategic cooperation.

And although some intelligence-sharing was reduced during the Pollard affair, other channels remained open. The Joint Economic Development Group, designed to help Israel improve its economy, met in mid-December. Earlier in the month, the Joint Political-Military Group held its semi-annual session to discuss, among other topics, the possibility of pre-positioning United States military equipment in Israel for use by American forces in a crisis. An Israeli team also came to Washington this month to be briefed on President Reagan's space-defense program with an eye toward bidding on research and technical contracts.

All this derives both from the political influence of Israel's American supporters and from what is seen by this Administration as a proximity of American and Israeli interests in the Middle East. Israel provides the United States with some valuable intelligence information and a potential staging point for military forces.

But the countries' interests also diverge at times. A longstanding difference has existed over the ultimate disposition of the West Bank, which the United States may press Israel to relinquish if an Arab peace proposal can be negotiated. In addition, some United States Government analysts and military officers believe that ties with Israel damage relations with the larger Arab world.

Israel has also resisted serving as a surrogate for the United States. About a year and a half ago, a former diplomat recalled, Israel turned down an American request to provide arms and training to the so-called contras fighting the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua. "They are willing to go in with us in the open," he said of the Israelis. "But to get the onus for assisting the contras while the U.S. is standing aside and keeping their hands clean? No."



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Abraham D. Sofaer, the State Department's legal counsel, in Tel Aviv this month.